

## GAUNT AND CAMBRIDGE: THE WARRNAMBOOL CONNECTION.

IN DECEMBER 1896, a richly ornamented three-panel Victorian screen was put together by local residents for presentation to Lady Brassey, wife of the Governor of Victoria, at a comprehensive industrial and art exhibition in Warrnambool. The Warrnambool *Standard* (Saturday 12 December 1896) reports:

A screen which has been designed by Miss Duncan will form one of the most interesting exhibits at the Warrnambool exhibition. The lady has devoted a lot of attention to the work, and it will be alike unique and handsome. There are numerous original oil paintings and drawings on the screen, together with reading matter, in prose and poetry, descriptive of the scenes portrayed [sic]. The paintings have been executed by artists, including Mr. S. Pearce Fuller, Miss Mitchell, Mr. George Lance, Miss Evans, Miss B. Duncan, Miss Lance, the Misses Cramer, Miss Mullett (of Hawthorn), the Misses Whitty (of Riverina), Miss Hammond (of Brighton), Mr. Jas. McLeod, Mr. Jordan, Miss Hamilton. Among the contributors to the literary work on the screen are — Rolf Boldrewood, Mary Gaunt (Mrs. Lindsay Miller), Ada Cambridge (Mrs. Cross), Mrs. Thead, Miss Murray, Miss Hamilton, Miss Dixon, 'Adeline', Mr. J.S. Stanley, the Rev. W. Gray Dixon, M.A., Mr. Loughrane, Mr. O'Hara, Mr. James McLeod, Mr. F. Smith, and Mr. H.W. Osborne. These contributions have been typewritten in an artistic style by Miss Duncan. Altogether the screen will be handsome and attractive, and the design reflects credit on that lady.

Because of viceregal protocol, Lady Brassey had to decline the gift, which was ultimately accepted by Lady Madden, wife of the Lieutenant-Governor and Chief Justice, Sir John Madden. Lady Madden was apparently delighted with the gift, but it passed out of the family, returning to Flagstaff Hill, Warrnambool, in 1975 by private donation. An article written by Bruce Morris in the Warrnambool *Standard*, 7 April 1984, for Heritage Week, explaining the provenance of the screen, further informs us:

As was only to be expected, in the 79 years that elapsed between the time the screen was presented to Lady Brassey, and the time it arrived at Flagstaff Hill, the appearance of the many pictures and the typescript deteriorated markedly.

The screen is, however, historically significant, comprising paintings and writings by local artists and literary pieces by those of more widespread reputation. The only Warrnambool personality featured on the screen is Wilmot, the last surviving full-blooded aborigine from the district, photographed by Arthur Jordan.

At the top of panel three appears 'The Muster Song' by 'Rolf Boldrewood'. Amongst other connections, Boldrewood is known to have grazed cattle on the site of Warrnambool before it was settled. On panel five (that is, the reverse side), is a painting of Lord Brassey's yacht, 'Sunbeam', by George Lance and a poem by local solicitor, Cornelius O'Mahoney, entitled 'Sunbeam Outward Bound'. The 'Sunbeam' apparently called unexpectedly at Warrnambool in March, 1896.

A contribution by Mary Gaunt, 'The Mouth of the Hopkins River', is a short prose piece about the river as it runs out into the sea near Pickering Point. Gaunt, of course, lived in Warrnambool from 1894 to 1901 during her marriage to the Warrnambool doctor, H. Lindsay Miller, and the latter part of her novel *Kirkham's Find*<sup>1</sup> is set in and around Warrnambool. Warrnambool Public Library's copy of the novel had, according to its inscription, previously belonged to Leslie F. Trigg of 'Yaralla', Allansford, and

Morris surmises (*Warrnambool Standard*, 3 January 1978) that Phoebe's bee farm was at Allansford, between Warrnambool and Nirrandu. A handwritten note on the flyleaf of Trigg's copy describes the book as 'a story of Allansford'.

'The Mouth of the Hopkins River' is a descriptive piece, relying to some extent on pathetic fallacy in Gaunt's description of the wheat and marram grass. It expresses her close affinity with the coastline, and her knowledge of the treacherous waters beyond the Warrnambool cliffs, in which many shipwrecks had occurred:

On the right bank are the rocks, winter worn and rugged for the sea has beaten against them for thousands of years, cut its way through the wall of rock, worn it into a platform in some places and here, where it is only washed by high tide is a veritable sea garden for the sea-weed is one mass of white blossom and round the edge is a border of vivid green. All wet and shining it looks this calm day with the waters gently breaking over it. Just the soft lap lap of the water reaches my ears and with the warm sun and the warm sand, the soft cool breeze there comes stealing over me a pleasant drowsy feeling. One might sleep and dream away an afternoon there — there is no thought of the bitter winter's storm, no trace of the tossing breakers in which no boat can live.

Gaunt's significance to the ornamental screen is clear. More puzzling is a short verse, 'Daisies', by Ada Cambridge, which, according to Morris, 'does not of itself add much to the meaning of the screen'. Cambridge, as he correctly states, apparently 'had no association with the Warrnambool district', although Williamstown, where she lived at the time, was only 160 miles away.<sup>2</sup> The verse is an occasional piece, brief and epigrammatic:

Love flowers and fades, like Daisies in the grass,  
 And flowers again  
 But wherefore not? though Daisies bloom and pass,  
 The roots remain.

This is not an example of Cambridge's best writing, and the verse does not, to my knowledge, appear elsewhere. It echoes the first line of stanza two in the poem, 'Too Late'<sup>3</sup>:

Love flowers and fades like grass, and flowers again.

'Too Late', however, has a much more complex and highly wrought message than 'Daisies'. One implication is that Cambridge produced 'Daisies' without the usual deeply felt personal circumstances that accompanied most of her poetry, possibly in response to a request for a few lines for the screen.

Ada Cambridge had a passing acquaintance with Lord Brassey through her Sydney visit in July 1887. 'Rolf Boldrewood' was a personal friend as early as 1875. By 1896 she would have heard of Mary Gaunt, who had published a novel, a collection of stories and a newspaper serial<sup>4</sup> and was already known to her, although the period of their association through the Women Writers' Club was somewhat later.<sup>6</sup> By that time Cambridge was an established Australian author, numbering among her literary acquaintances such celebrities as Rudyard Kipling, Hugh McCrae, Henry Gyles Turner, Henry Gullett, Ethel Turner, and Grace 'Jennings' Carmichael. Presumably, it was

believed that her contribution would add to the historical significance of the screen, whether there was a personal connection or not.

It is disappointing that the choice was not more pertinent, or a more appropriate example of Cambridge's poetic skills, but her very inclusion gives rise to interesting speculation.

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#### NOTES

1. London: Methuen, 1897. Reprinted Ringwood, Vic.: Penguin, 1988.
2. Families in Hamilton and Coleraine, where Cambridge lived from 1877-1883, also had connections in Warrnambool.
3. *Unspoken Thoughts* (London: Kegan Paul, Trench & Co, 1887; repr. Canberra: Dept. of English, ADFA, 1988), p.135.
4. *Dave's Sweetheart* (London: Edward Arnold, 1894); *The Moving Finger* (London: Methuen & Co., 1895); *The Other Man* (Melbourne: *Argus*, 13 October 1894 – 12 January 1895).
5. Gaunt reviewed Cambridge's *The Three Miss Kings* for the *Australasian Critic* in September 1891. See Elizabeth Morrison, 'Retrieving Colonial Literary Culture: The Case for an Index to Serial Fiction in Australian (or Australasian?) Newspapers', *Bibliographical Society of Australia and New Zealand Bulletin*, 13,1, (First Quarter, 1989; issued July 1990), 31.
6. There is some uncertainty about how early the Club began. Mary Gaunt had left Australia permanently by 1901, which would indicate a date prior to this.

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